



Region 5 Parks
2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings MT 59105

NOTICE OF DECISION

August 8, 2012

TO: Environmental Quality Council
Director's Office, Dept. of Environmental Quality
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks*
 Director's Office
 Parks Division Administrator
 Parks Division Design & Construction
 FWP Legal Unit
 Region 5 Supervisor
Montana Historical Society, State Preservation Office
Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Montana State Library
George Ochenski
Montana Environmental Information Center
Wayne Hirst, Montana State Parks Foundation
FWP Commissioner Shane Colton
Our Montana
DNRC, State Water Projects Bureau
County Commissioners
Carbon County Commissioners
Stillwater County Commissioners

* (Sent electronically)

Ladies and gentlemen:

Montana State Parks, a division of the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks prepared a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for proposed campground improvements at Red Lodge Campground at Cooney State Park. The draft EA was circulated for a 30 day comment period from June 6 through July 6, 2012 and legal notices were published in the Billings Gazette and Helena Independent Record as well as on Montana's electronic bulletin board. Notices were sent to 164 interested individuals and organizations and the EA was posted on the FWP website.

Description of Proposed Action. Parks proposes to improve campground and camp-host facilities at Red Lodge Campground by implementing Alternative C, contingent on final design and funding. This action would include construction of a new camp spur and 7 pull-through double-occupancy campsites; construction of two circular spurs to accommodate large groups with four double-occupancy back-in campsites each; and extension of the existing spur adding

five tent campsites. A total of 20 campsites would be added and all new double-occupancy sites would have electrical hook-ups.

In addition, Parks proposes to extend an existing trail along the north shore of Cooney Reservoir. The trail would be funded through Recreational Trails Grant contingent on a successful grant application.

This action would be consistent with Cooney State Park Management Plan goals to 1) Improve and diversify camping opportunities and facilities for visitors; and 2) Increase revenue from Montana State Parks.

Public Comment

6 comments were received from individuals and organizations during the 30-day comment period. The following comments and responses are discussed below. This Decision Notice constitutes modifications to the Draft EA and can be considered the final plan.

1. Letter from **Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) State Water Projects Bureau** in support of enhanced recreational opportunities at Cooney. DNRC also requested verification of permits and clearances, that the State Water Projects Bureau is included on all mailings regarding Cooney improvements, and that all project design plans be provided to their Helena office for review. Montana State Parks leases the majority of Cooney State Park from DNRC, which retains the right to review improvements for impacts to Cooney Dam and Reservoir.

Response. Montana State Parks will comply with DNRC's requests.

2. Email from Montana **Historical Society— State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)** recommending that a cultural resource inventory be conducted.

Response. Montana State Parks will comply with required cultural clearances, coordinated with SHPO by the Parks Division Heritage Resource Program Lead.

3. Email from **Lori Harmon** in support of the project. Suggested creating a "camping only" reservation option. Would like to reserve double sites for use as singles.

Response. MSP will consider these management/reservation options in accordance with our Biennial Fee Rule.

4. Email from **"memepapa" (unknown email addressee)** in support of the project, supports Alternative B. Supports a second campground host site. Would like Parks to continue to provide water through the first week of October, and to add dog waste stations, showers and a dump station. They would also like electrical hookups in Marshall Cove Campground.

Response. Parks will consider these facility/management/reservation options.

5. Email/letter from **Stillwater County Commissioners** opposing the project or the following reasons, 1) due to the statement in the EA that funding for maintenance and public safety has not kept pace with increase use of State Parks. The Commissioners asked if this is the case, why is it that Parks is proposing to expand campsites? And 2) the impacts of current and

increased use on the Shane Creek Road and the need for Parks to cost Share with Stillwater County for maintenance on the road.

Response. The increased number of campsites will generate additional revenue that can help with operations costs. Since this is an existing campground, there will be some economies of scale in providing for public safety and maintenance of the site. Cooney State Park instituted a new Park Warden position in 2011 to improve the integration of public safety and law enforcement into park operations.

Parks participated in a meeting with a Stillwater County Commissioner, the Stillwater County road supervisor and Shane Creek Road residents to discuss maintenance options for Shane Creek Road, the primary access route to Cooney from the west. Parks road maintenance funds are limited and prioritized for internal roads and roads immediately adjacent to the park, however, Parks will continue to discuss this issue and the possibility of cost sharing road maintenance as priorities and funding allows. In addition, Parks will increase its communications with Stillwater County including Shane Creek residents, the Commissioners and local tourism representatives to both provide economic support to Stillwater County communities and to pursue solutions for park influenced road impacts.

6. Email from **Bonnie Lovelace, Montana Department of Environmental Quality**, providing a correction regarding a duplication of DEQ permits listed.

Response. Parks will make the correction.

Decision

Montana State Parks has decided to proceed with these proposed campground and trail improvements at Cooney State Park. Alternative C will be constructed, dependent upon final design and available funding. The campground will have an additional camp host pad, multiple capacity campsites and a water well for irrigation and drinking water as area hydrology allows.

In addition, Parks will extend a trail through the North Shore unit of Cooney State Park, to provide hiking opportunities and to provide access to walk/boat in campsites along the North Shore. This will be funded through the Recreational Trails Program if an application for grant funding is approved.

This project is subject to appeal, which must be submitted to the Parks Division Administrator in writing, and postmarked within 30 days of the date of this decision notice. The appeal must specifically describe the basis for the appeal, explain how the appellant has previously commented to the department or participated in the decision-making process, and lay out how Montana State Parks might address the concerns in the appeal. If you have any questions regarding this decision notice, please contact me at dhabermann@mt.gov or call 247-2954.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Doug J. Habermann", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Doug Habermann
Regional Parks Manager